Lucky or Blessed

A Challenge in Reflection

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Michael G. Finley

Lucky or Blessed

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ISBN (XXXXXXXXXXXXX)

Printed in USA by 48HrBooks (www.48HrBooks.com)

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my favorite wife, who has been by my side since day one. As a wife you always supported me in all my ventures and you have given me five wonderful children that you would be immensely proud of today. As a friend, you always encouraged and instilled positive thinking. As a Christian, you helped me to grow and mature in the LORD.

I am who I am today because of your presence in my life. I will love you always and I consider myself extremely blessed to have your memory in my heart forever. Even though you have gone home to be with the LORD, you remain by my side.

No dedication would be complete without the inclusion of my mother and children.

I also want to co-dedicate this book to my mom and grandmother who were instrumental in forging my core values. In honor of them, I will be writing all my books using my mother’s maiden name, Finley. I love you grandmother and mom (more affectionately, but commonly expressed as “my Mommy, Mommy, Mommy, Mommy”!

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Foreword

[Reserved for primary reviewer]

Preface

Who should read this book? Everyone. It is written as a challenge for the god-fearing, the agnostic and especially the atheist. If you consider yourself to be a resident of one of these categories, you will gain a new perspective from reading its contents.

This book is the first of several that I have been contemplating authoring over the past few years. It has finally been completed due to the encouragement of many who believe that it will be of great benefit to those who read it. Indeed, it is my hope that this book will be a source of encouragement and hope, and act as a catalyst for change; a change in your perspective on life.

Since I was a child, I have loved science and mathematics. A dream was fulfilled when I became a full-fledged scientist. As a scientist, I have spent most of my life analyzing, experimenting and researching various phenomena. One topic that has always fascinated me is the concept of a dichotomy. I was so amazed that there could be an absolute truth, and yet still have those who denied its correctness.

Merriam-Webster defines a dichotomy as a division into two especially mutually exclusive or contradictory groups or entities; something with seemingly contradictory qualities. In his book Conversation with God, author Neale Donald Walsch introduces the concept of a divine dichotomy. Mr. Walsch defines a divine dichotomy as a situation in which two apparently contradictory experiences, evidences, or truths seem to be existing harmoniously at the same time in the same space. I could have not articulated it better. It is this dichotomous classification that I would like to explore in this book. Therefore, we will utilize this definition to look a set of dichotomies that have peaked my interest for many years. The primary … the huge division among people when it comes to the subject of GOD which is directly proportional to the sub-dichotomy of lucky versus blessed. As a scientist, I have been in the unique situation where people have approached me from all walks of life to get my opinion, from a scientific view, on spiritually related phenomena and concepts. Having spent many years engaging in these conversations, I have constructed a mental catalogue of views and stances from both side of the equation. When an event happened, I made it a practice of inquiring as to why a person took a certain position or view of the situation and outcome. Trending towards the rhetorical, I could guess the most likely response based on what I knew about the religious beliefs or true character of the individual providing the answers.

Reviewing the historical events in my own life, I asked myself the same questions that I had been posing to others, and I realized that the answer to my questions depended on having the proper perspective towards life. Taking the proper perspective is a requirement for making intelligent decisions as scientist, investigator, teacher … a good human being. I am not expressing a view without substance, but a view that has been developed by looking through the corrective lenses of everyday life.

Take for example the person that is a racist. Ever talked with or heard them express their opinions and views? No matter the circumstances, the negative thinking, or negative perspective leads to narrow-minded short-sided conclusions. It is only when these individuals open up to a more expanded and positive perspective that they are able to, and often do, consider alternative views. A positive change in perspective is not easy and can be extremely challenging. The primary criteria for implementing this change must be the desire to do so. If there is a desire, one can witness similar thought progressions for other types of extremists as well.

It is for these reasons that I have written this book. I want it to be catalyst for changing perspectives. Using real-life stories, you will be asked to read and classify each a story using one of two classification: blessed or lucky. These stories happened, so they cannot simply be dismissed as fictions of imagination or pure fantasies. Reading them with the proper perspective will either challenge your current way of thinking or serve to strengthen it. In many cases they will do both. However, there will be those that will not change their way of thinking no matter what is presented to them. Let’s read a simple example.

Humans are interestingly amazing. They can believe and equally not believe in the strangest things. As you read the stories in this book, you will discover that I spent a lot of my childhood in a small town in Texas. It was there that I would visit my grandmother each and every summer. Many years later, after graduating from the university and starting my professional career, I went back to visit her. At the time, I was working as a rocket propulsion scientist for a major solid booster company in Utah. While visiting, I ran into some old childhood friends who still lived there. After a light exchange of pleasantries, we started discussing our current statuses in life. They asked me what I was doing those days, and I reluctantly explained that I was working for the same company that manufactured the solid-propellant boosters for the Space Shuttle. To my surprise, after several eyebrows were raised, they yelled, “You believe in that stuff, man? That is all a bunch of b……, designed to take your money!” I thought about how I would respond, but what could I say to such a statement? As politely as I could I said, “Well, I guess so since I do work there and see the boosters live and in-person every day. We also have live feeds directly to our computers from the launches. So, I guess I believed in the space shuttle.”

My explanation had zero impact on them. Their perspective did not waver in the least. They were totally convinced that the shuttle was a myth and we had all been brainwashed. That is the way it is with negatively thinking, myopic people. They only see one way, one reason, one outcome and you can do nothing to alter those views. For these types of individuals, it usually takes a major life-changing event to facilitate a different way of thinking or a change in their perspective. Unfortunately, even with these life changing events, nothing changes. I expect similar results from some of the readers of this book. They will respond in ways that mirror those of my old friends back in that small country town in Texas.

Introduction

Have you or someone you’ve known experienced a life-threatening situation or witnessed a horrific event? When all the excitement subsided, what was your immediate reaction? Did you find yourself saying something like “She was lucky, or, "They were lucky"? Alternatively, did you find yourself saying “He was blessed, or they were blessed”? I would venture to say that most of us have experienced such situations in our lives. Why the difference in opinions for the same event? I believe we ultimately classify the consequences of these events based on our belief system, and it is this system that determines the reflective effect of the lens that filters our viewport of the world. Luck dominates a worldly view. Blessed dominate the godly. I’ve found that this contrast in opinions is consistent across all types of change-events ranging from materialistic loss or gain to the sustainment or loss of life.

Therein lies my fascination with the dichotomy. When I was a child I there was an accident on I-35 near Dallas, Texas. Several members of the same family were killed. My mother was watching the news on one of the major network channels. The anchor reporting on the story said that the survivors were lucky to be alive. I did not pay much attention to the comment until my mother changed channels. She stopped on one of the religious channels and they were discussing the same story. However, the reporter on this channel said the family received a blessing in that lives were spared. The difference in opinions has stuck with me since that day. I continue to ask myself the same question; how can anyone maintain the same view or perspective across so many diverse situations? After many years of observation and hundreds of conversations, I have narrowed the

root cause down to one simple noun: Perspective! Perspective is an attitude towards the way we regard something. It is how we view the world, and I believe that at its core, the strength of spiritual foundation or lack thereof, forms the basis of our views. It provides the color that brightens through the lens. This book is about perspective and viewpoints. It was written to challenge your view of the world -- To test your perspective. Let me demonstrate the approach with the following story:

I used to own a software engineering company where the majority of our clients were seeking someone who could come into a chaotic project, make observations and offer recommendations to resolve problems. One of my colleagues who was supporting me on the project was a bodybuilder. He competed in local and national bodybuilding competitions throughout the United States.

One day at a client site, we were sitting in the break room making coffee. We customarily arrived earlier than everyone, which afforded us time to discuss plans for how we would tackle the problems for that day. I noticed that our conversation was one-sided and that he seemed to be preoccupied with something. I asked him what was on his mind, and he proceeded to tell me that last night he had a dream about his grandmother. His grandmother had been dead for about seven years as I remember. He said that it was strange because he had never dreamt of her before. I told him that those type of dreams happened all the time and asked if it was the reason for his preoccupation. He replied, “Oh no. It was much more intriguing than that. It was what she said in the dream that awakened his inquisitiveness.”

He explained that in the dream he was speeding down a road on his motorcycle. It was late at night, and he was on his way home from riding around some of the country roads just outside of town. There was a full moon, so his surroundings were illuminated and visible in the moonlight. As he rounded a bend, he noticed a dark shape directly in his path. At first, he thought it was his imagination, but drawing closer, he realized that it was a figure. The figure was waving its hands back and forth and was yelling. At this distance, he could not make out want it was saying, but as he drew closer, he could hear clearly. The figure was telling him to stop. "Stop! They said, Stop! Look out for the hole!" Whoever was there was too close for him to brake safely, so he quickly laid the bike down, sliding past the figure, barely missing it. His leg had become caught under the motorcycle and the hot exhaust pipes. It was scrapped and burned.

He rolled over and looked up towards the road in the direction where he last saw the figure. It was still there. He said he got to his feet and paced towards it. As he approached, he could see that it was indeed a person. It was an elderly female, and she stood perfectly still. Despite all that had just happened, she had not moved an inch. He screamed at her asking her what the hell she thought she was doing, standing in the middle of the road like that, and at the end of a curve! She was lucky that he was able to see her and dump his bike. The elderly lady remained quiet. At that moment, he realized that the figure was his grandmother! Goodness! His grandmother had been standing in the middle of the road. How did she get way out here and why was she positioned there? He said “Granny, what in the world are you doing?” Suddenly she spoke. She replied, “Watch out!” Then she motioned to a massive hole in the road. He looked down at the ground, and he could now see the black hole. The light seemed to be non-existent inside of it which explained why he had missed it? He then looked back up towards his grandmother, and she was gone.

Having a quizzical look on his face, he said, “That’s it.” He told me that he had been thinking about his dream since waking up that morning. He was trying to figure out its meaning. She was warning him about something. but what? He looked at me and said, “Mike, what does your science mind tell you about that?” I told him that I had no idea what it meant. I could only speculate, and that is all that it would be, speculation. However, I would suggest that you do what feels right. My advice was not very scientific, but it was appropriate for the moment.

The next day I flew back to Houston and did not speak with him again until the following Monday. Monday morning, I caught up with him at work. I asked him what happened after the dream. He stated that he did not know why, but although feeling fine, he decided to visit the doctor for a checkup and blood tests. The test results had just come back, and they were not good. The tests revealed that he had cancer. He lowered his head, and for several seconds, looked down at the floor. Raising his head, he said the good news was that the doctors had detected it in its early stages, and it was moderately aggressive. The prognosis was good, and the cancer was treatable. That was over 15 years ago!

I recently caught up him, and he now resides in New York City. Sadly, the cancer had returned, and this time it was more aggressive. He is taking experimental drugs which appear to be working. Recent scans show that the tumors have not spread and have remained relatively static in volume. The doctors do not know how long the drugs will stay effective, so they have not given him a timetable.

As I reflect on this situation, we must consider the dream. No matter your perspective on life or your view of the world, no matter your belief system, you cannot remove it from the equation, and you cannot dismiss it. The dream was the major contributing factor in this story. Because of it, he was afforded an additional 15 years, or more, to enjoy his family.

I suspect that a range of emotions surfaced while you were reading this story. I selected this story to introduce you to the basic premise of this book because it would solicit a wide range of opinions. The story contains a speckle of the miraculous, a taste of divine intervention, a pinch of fantasy, and a cup full of the hard realities of life; all rolled up into one. Depending on one's perspective, many will classify this story as a blessing while others will view it as just pure luck. Make a point of remembering your current classification of this story. On which side of the dichotomy do you reside? Read the stories presented in this book and reflect on them using the reflection technique shown in the book. Once completed, reread the story above. Take notes about how you now approach the reading of the story. See if your perspective has changed, and if a new classification is the result.

Although this book is about challenging and changing perspectives, its influence should be much, much more. For many of you, I would like for it to serve as an example of a blessing catalog. I hope that it will inspire you to create your own, and share it with your family and friends, and encourage them to do the same. Let these catalogs become your source of encouragement when the inevitable trials of life invade your world. So, if you are ready, let’s get started!

**Part One**

**The Challenge**

So, what is our challenge? Now is the time for us to take a closer look. The challenge is the following: If you use the reflection technique presented in this book to evaluate the stories that are presented, I am betting that your perspective will begin to change, and that change will be manifested in the classification that you assign to each of the stories as you reflect on the outcome. In addition, the change will be positive, and you will “gain” a new perspective to assist your ratiocination process.

If you recall, earlier I stated that this book was written for everyone. Well that claim wasn’t exactly true. I confess that the book targets three groups of people: atheist, agnostic, and theist. Let’s start with the atheist.

Atheists are my primary target audience because over the years, we have had some interesting and challenging conversations. The discussions have been “deep” as well and I have thoroughly enjoyed them. Never combative, simply interesting.

The secondary target is the agnostic. Our conversations have not been as exciting per se, but good enough to point that you should find this challenge interesting as well.

Finally, we have the theists. It may not come as a surprise to many that this is the group where I have been engaged in some of the most ridiculous dialogue you can imagine, and the exchange has not always positive. Out of all the individuals I have spoken with, this group produced the most combative discussions as well. What does that mean? Well I have an opine of the subject, but we will table this topic for another day. Returning to topic, for you this book will be a template. A template for the construction of a catalog of blessings that use can use to record the events that have occurred in your own life.

I believe there will a positive degree of change in perspective across all our groups. However small the differential, the change will be evident.

Therefore, this challenge is all about transforming perspectives. How shall we change? Come along with me and participate in a small experiment. For our purposes, we will need to define a new field of scientific study. We will call the field P***erspectology***. It the study of the rates of change of perspective with respect to time in the presence of reflective filtering. We can formally express the definition mathematically using the following equation: ∆P/∆T\*(RF). We are all going to be “***perspectologist”*** scientists for a few days, and we are going to research and analyze specimens. Your favorite reading room will be the laboratory. The book will be our test tube that will house the specimens that we will evaluate. The stories will be our specimens. We will view our specimens using a high-powered microscope that was constructed using our reflective technique. Using this apparatus, we will examine our specimens, record our observations and draw conclusions based on the scientific evidence. Our conclusions, we will help us to classify our specimens as belonging to one of three taxonomies: lucky, blessed, and for the sake of completeness, inconclusive. Although this third classification does not directly support a dichotomous relationship, it is required nevertheless.

Before we define the reflection technique, we must have a common definition of the dichotomous terms. Lucky and blessed (Inconclusive should be self-explanatory). For our purposes, how shall we define these terms. We can find common definitions in every dictionary. For example, Miriam-Webster defines luck as "the things that happen to a person because of chance: the accidental way things happen without being planned and brings good fortune or adversity". If you look up the definition of luck at Dictioary.com you will that is defined as the force that seems to operate for good or ill in a person's life, as in shaping circumstances, events, or opportunities; a combination of circumstances, events, etc., operating by chance to bring good or ill to a person. There all kinds of luck: There is good luck, bad luck, lady luck, beginner's luck and dumb luck to name a few.

Miriam-Webster defines blessing as: “a thing conducive to happiness or welfare” The Oxford Living Dictionary offers us this definition: “God’s favour and protection”.

These are well established and accepted definitions. However, we will not make use of these definitions for our work. Instead, we will apply the following delineation:

*Luck is the outcome of an event that MAY lead to the glorification of GOD.*

*Blessing is the outcome of an event that WILL lead to the glorification of GOD*.

Now that we have some of the major terminology defined, let’s take aim and challenge a common idiom: “Do NOT focus on the what-ifs of life. They will only bring about more stress and anxiety.” I challenge this statement because it is false, but it will be false only under the right circumstances. What circumstance is that? you might ask. It is false when you have the right perspective. Without the it, the statement is often true. Therefore, in this book, as we working to change our perspective, the what-ifs will play a major role in our reflective analysis. In our research, we will discover that the what-ifs can be extremely beneficial to enhancement of our degree of appreciation for a specific outcome. They will carry significant weight and the reason is simple: the what-ifs magnify the significance of the what-dids! We will not look at the things that could have happened with a negative connotation, but instead use them to enlighten what did happen, thereby increasing our level of appreciation and thankfulness!

Let’s look at the reflective pattern we will apply to our story reading and reviews. Follow these steps:

1. Read the story as normal.
2. Classify the story using one of the taxonomies
3. Record the classification
4. Reread the story using the following steps (5-11)
5. Do your best to remove all preconceptions or prejudices

Albeit difficult for many of us, this is perhaps the most important step in our reflection technique. A narrow mindset must be left at the door. Before you begin to read, close your eyes and try to concentrate on impartiality. Read the narrative focusing on the event, the experience and the outcome.

1. Read the story in its entirety

Do not read a few initial sentences and then jump to the punch line. There are important details that you will miss.

1. Reread, projecting yourself into the situation

Place yourself in the identical situation of the story. Become one of the characters. Live the role. You will have a greater appreciation for the story.

1. Consider what happened (the what-dids)

An obvious step is to consider the outcome of the story. This will be seen as the most important part of the story. But hold on. It is not the only part of significance.

1. Consider what could have happened (the what-ifs)

Here we introduce the what-if concept. I argue that it can have the almost the identical effect on the reflection of the story as the what-dids. You will be applying a weighting factor to the what-ifs in our stories. I leave it up to you to decide the value of the weighting factor. Everyone’s value will be different at first, but the predicted trend resulting from our reflection technique will be a decrease in the relative value assigned to the what-dids and what-ifs. A suggestion would be to start your what-did value at 10. Using this value will provide a large enough range to see the full extent of the variance as you continue to apply the technique to subsequent stories.

1. Compare the what-ifs with the what-dids

Note that is not just a mathematical summation in the least as the relative values should be changing over time. I leave it to you the reader to assign a weight factor to the what-if. For maximum effectiveness, try assigning a value of 0 or 1. The reason for this is simple. As your perspective changes, you will find yourself wondering if you gave the what-if the right value. An interesting exercise would be to compare the average weight given to a what-if at the beginning of our exercise. And then compare against the average value as you approach the end of your readings.

1. Place the story in the lucky or blessed category

Based on your observations and application of the steps above, classify the story.

1. How does this classification compare to the one you assigned in step #2? This last classification is the one we will carry forward.

Now that we understand the reflection process, we will apply it to our stories. At the end of each story, you will be given the opportunity to select a category, lucky or blessed, that you will assign to the story. When you reach the end of the book, you will be asked to sum up the number of stories that fall into each category. The summation will provide a final score that will reveal much about yourself. Before we start our actual

So, if you are ready ... let’s read on!

For the readers that embellishes additional challenges, I point you to a mind-mapping technique to gain even a further appreciation and understanding of the stories while uncovering the hidden elements that surface. I sometimes study the bible using mind maps and it raises a whole new level of understanding. However, that is a topic for another day and another book!

So, using these definitions, let’s move on to the next chapter and take a look at a couple of real-world examples.

**Chapter One**

**Establishing a Reflective Context**

In This Chapter

To help us establish oura These stories are introduced at this time to establish a foundation for you with the application of these guiding definitions to your reading, let’s consider the following real-world stories. which should easily establish the boundaries for considering either classification for our stories.

**Example One: The Lucky Streak**

People were running into the Casino, hands waving in the air and beckoning those they knew inside to come outside and follow them. We were not sure what might have been going on out there … if there was a disturbance or something more threatening, but whatever it was, the situation made for an anxious conclusion to our first set of the evening.

During my years as a professional entertainer, we performed at the Sahara Hotel in Lake Tahoe, NV. During these bookings, I had the opportunity to witness several amazing win streaks. Most of those streaks were short-lived, lasting for only several minutes to a maximum of a couple of hours. One Saturday evening there was a man who was on a rare winning streak that lasted for several hours. The streak happened at one of the smaller casinos located down the street from the Sahara.

When we went on our first break of the evening, we could hear many of the patrons discussing the event as it was unfolding. This was obviously the reason people were running into and out of the casino. Many had come back to the Sahara to gather their companions and friends and perhaps ride the winning streak themselves. Since we were due back on stage in a few minutes, I was unable to go and witness the event first hand. Instead, I had to rely on the reports as they were told by patrons upon their return. It was said that an individual down the street had won sums of money totaling in the six figures. He had managed this feat at the craps table where he continually landed on the pass line without crapping for almost two hours. I thought this streak remarkable until I read the story of Archie Karas.

Archie Karas is an American gambler. Born in Greece, he was responsible for one of the most documented winning streaks in gambling history. The streak was known as “The Run” and has been documented in many articles and magazines. Mr. Karas arrived in Las Vegas, NV in December 1992 with only $50 to his name. His winning streak began after obtaining a $10,000 stake.

Using the stake, he proceeded to play Rass and seven-card stud. In six months, Archie had managed to amass a small fortune of $17M. At this point, most people, including me, would have cashed in their chips and headed for home. However, Archie played on.

Archie believed in maximizing the time spent he would spend at the tables. He was accustomed to betting as much money as the betting limits would allow …and winning huge sums as quickly as possible. Therefore, he would only visit and sit down at the tables that allowed for high-stakes gambling. Using this technique, over the next several years he managed to increase his winnings to grand total of greater than $40M! Wow! That is a lucky streak if I have ever heard of one.

However, as with any lucky streak, all must come to an end. By the end of 1995, Archie had managed to lose all the earnings that he gained during those years. Due to his high-stakes playing style, the money was lost as quickly as it was won.

Alex still resides in Las Vegas today.

**Example Two: A Deadly Roll**

It had baffled the airline industry.  The National Transportation and Safety Board (NTSB) had no explanation …  There had been several crashes and the investigation into the root cause of those crashes had not produced any conclusive evidence.  Each incident followed a similar pattern … As the aircraft readied for landing and on its final approach, it would suddenly roll sharply to the left or to the right.  During one such scenario, the roll event was described as “seeming like a life-time’ before the aircraft leveled out and flew normally.  Unfortunately, many who experienced this a scenario did not survive.

The Boeing 737 is one of the most popular airliners in the world. It is estimated that the 737 has carried over 12 billion passengers1.  That is a lot of people. The airplane has proven to be one of the safest in the industry during its 30 years of service.  The 737 can accommodate between 85-215 passengers depending on the model. It has two engines, one mounted on each wing and is a beautiful aircraft. In fact, I have flown on the Boeing 737 many, many times.

During the 1990's, there were problems that surfaced with the 737’s rudder system. The flaw was severe and resulted in several reported incidents and two major accidents. The accidents resulted in the combined deaths of 157 people. Following these two accidents was another incident. One that would open the door for investigators to finally determine the root cause of these rudder failures.

The first accident occurred in 1991. A Boeing 737 crashed on approach into Colorado Springs, Co.  United Airlines flight 585 was a scheduled passenger flight that originated in Denver, Colorado.  The flight time was roughly 23 minutes between Denver and Colorado Springs.. Air Traffic Control (ATC) had warned the United pilots of moderate to severe turbulence in the area.

As the aircraft was preparing to land and on its final approach into Colorado Springs, it suddenly rolled sharply to the right and began to spin out of control and crashed.  The crash was believed to be caused by a phenomenon known as rudder hard-over. Rudder hard-over leads to a sudden movement of the rudder which can result in a violent uncontrollable roll.

The investigation into the crash proved to be a daunting task. A "probable cause" was not determined and after an exhaustive investigation, no conclusive explanation was given to explain the accident. All  20 passengers and 5 crew members were killed.

Several years passed without there being any major 737 accidents. Then in 1993, another Boeing 737 experienced similar rudder issues on its approach into Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.  USAir Flight 427 departed from Chicago, Illinois with a destination of West Palm Beach, Florida. The flight had a scheduled layover in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.

On approach into Pittsburg, the aircraft was sequenced behind a Delta Airlines 727 aircraft. As Flight 427 was making its final approach into Pittsburg at an altitude of 6000 feet, it suddenly made a violent roll to the left. The pilots tried to correct, but were unable to terminate the roll and the aircraft spiraled down into the ground. Like the 1991 crash, investigators failed to reach a conclusion on the reason behind the accident. The two crashes seem to be mirror images of each other. The one difference in this crash was that the sky was clear and calm. Rudder hard over was detected by reviewing the flight data recorder information. All 132 passengers and crew on flight 427 were killed.

The investigation received a huge breakthrough in 1996, when another Boeing 737, on approach to the airport in Richmond, Virginia, had problems with their flight controls when unexpected rudder commands were executed by the aircraft. Eastwind Airlines Flight 517 was a passenger flight departing from Trenton, New Jersey with a destination of Richmond, Virginia. On final approach into Richmond, at an altitude of 4000 feet, the rudder suddenly deflected causing the aircraft to roll right. For over 30 seconds the aircraft flew in a precarious right bank until the aircraft suddenly returned to a stable horizontal flying position. After another 30 seconds, the aircraft began to roll to the right. After another 30 seconds the aircraft leveled out into normal flight. And the pilots proceeded to landed safely at Richmond.  All 49 passengers and 5 crew members escaped with only some minor injuries being reported due to the violent movements of the aircraft.

NTSB finally had the break they had been waiting for. The investigators had an intact 727 and live pilots to work with. After 5 years of probing for clues, the investigation now had all the information needed to solve the mystery. It was eventually determined that under certain conditions, the rudder of the 737 could move in the opposite direction of the direction commanded. Using this new evidence, Boeing was able to fix the problem and there has not been a similar incident since.

These stories should provide some solid examples of our lucky and blessed classifications. Using the established definitions, what would be your conclusion as you reflect on these two events?  For the record, I consider the first story to reside firmly within our luck classification. The second, I would place in the blessed category.

What do you think? Especially for our second example. Would you say the passengers and crew of Eastwind Airlines Flight 517 were simply lucky, or would you they were the recipients of something more wonderful? Perhaps ... just perhaps … was there a Paul on board?

**Example Three: All alone**

There had been a series of break-ins and rapes in North West Harris County that year. Companies were hiring extra security guards to escort their female employees to their vehicles when leaving work. Crimes like this manifest themselves every day, but with our busy schedules, we can become complacent and oblivious to these incidents. Many times, it takes a front-page story, or worse, something to happen within our own families to grab our attention and force recognition of life's fragility. This story describes the events of an eventless evening. An evening where nothing happened, but that is precisely the point.

At the time our story was unfolding, I was sitting in my office thinking of the different ways to start this book. I thought to myself “What better way to kick of the book than with this!” It illustrates the approach to story reflection I am asking you to consider while reading the book. Our two previous stories demonstrated examples of luck and blessings. Here, we will emphasize the what-ifs versus the what-dids, which are the primary building blocks of our reflection process. So, let me share the story with you, just as it happened; just as I wrote it that evening.

It is early on a Friday evening, and I am relaxing at home after a long day at work. Sitting in front of my computer, I am debating how I should start off this book; how to set the proper atmosphere, if you will, for you the reader to best experience and benefit from the reflective challenge. The occurrence of a single phone call was just what I needed to get things rolling.

I've just gotten off the phone with one of my daughters. She had called earlier that evening, but I did not hear my phone. I was working out in the small gym that I have in my garage, and I had forgotten my cell and left it in my bedroom. When I finished my workout and walked into the bedroom, I saw the light blinking on my phone. I recognized the number and checked the phone for the presence of the message symbol. She had not left a message, so I promptly called her back. However, the call went straight to her voicemail. I recorded a message ... "Hi honey, this is dad returning your call. I was out in the garage. Call me back when you can." I waited a few minutes for her to return my call but did not receive a callback. I called her cell again. Still nothing. After waiting several more minutes, I called a third time, and after a couple of rings, she answered. My mind and heart relaxed, and I felt a profound thank you flow throughout my body.

I asked her why she had called, and she said that she called because she was leaving work late and the security guards present to escort her to the car. She had parked the car in the employee parking garage. Her office building does not have a connected garage, so you have to walk over to the entrance. The garage was huge, it was empty, and she was by herself. She said that you could hear all of the creaks, squeaks and unfamiliar noises that the quietness had to offer. Daylight-savings time had just ended, so it was dark and raining. She hastened her steps and made it safely to the car. She was now on her way home.

For another employee at my daughter's company, this scenario had a different ending. So, my daughter, in the identical situation, reminded me of how fragile life can be, and how trouble can find us all at any time. The outcome of that evening is not something that I take lightly. It heightens my appreciation for my family's safety and protection; reminding me that I cannot be with them always. Things happen and do happen to ALL people.

Part Two

Health Stories

Chapter Two

The Fishbone

In This Chapter

* Something Smells Fishy
* The Unknown Illness
* The Evasive Diagnosis (Boo’s Illness)
* All Tangled Up
* Premature
* The Ball

You can either keep the words “Chapter One” above, or replace them with a chapter title, or use both. Whichever way you prefer.

Replace this wording with the body of your book. We’ve put a break after each chapter that will force the next chapter to start on an ODD (right hand) page. This is the industry standard format, and highly recommended.

Chapter X

Something Smells Fishy

After adding some catsup to the French fries and fish, I was ready to start eating. I grabbed a few French fries and took several bites of fish. When I swallowed, I felt something sharp pierce the side of my throat where it remained. It must be a bone, I thought, and it had taken up residence in my throat. I tried my best to play it off, so my grandparents would not know and scold me for gobbling my food again. I tried clearing my throat to see if it would loosen, but there was no movement. I tried drinking some Dr. Pepper with no result. I realized that the bone was stuck, and it was not going anywhere. I could no longer hide the situation from my grandparents as I had started to gag, and it was becoming laborious to breathe!

While I was growing up, I spent a lot of time with my grandparents. My grandparents lived in a small town in eastern Texas called Jacksonville. My visits were usually during the summer vacation months, and I would leave for Jacksonville a few weeks after we got out of school.

When my mother would take me to my grandparents, we would take the back roads instead of heading down the main interstate, I-20. The driving time was two and a half hours. As you approach the edge of town, there is a lake off to the right shoulder of the highway. The lake is named, as you might have guessed, Lake Jacksonville. From the lake to the city limits, the roadway is bordered by rows of trees. The trees were very special to me because they were planted by my grandfather when he worked for the department of transportation. They reminded me of him as we entered the town.

My grandfather loved to fish, and I always enjoyed tagging along. However, I must admit that I enjoyed being in the outdoors with my grandfather more than fishing! We would go fishing several times a week. There were numerous fishing places around, and I never knew which one we would visit on any trip. Today we were going to Lake Jacksonville.

We got up early that morning and prepared the fishing gear and drove to the lake. My grandparents’ home is only several miles from the lake, so it was a quick trip. We spent several hours fishing. My grandfather would let me bait the hook which was always fun. The bait we used were worms that I had dug up in our backyard the evening before. I would throw out my line into the water, and my grandfather would walk a few feet away and tossed his line in as well. By the end of the day, we had managed to catch several catfish and close to a dozen perch. My grandfather would unhook those catfish and let me unhook the other. We would then place the fish in a water cooler. I never liked those catfish. They were mean and just as ugly. They would also stab you with those fins if you were not careful. The perches were my favorite. They had a more pleasing appearance and behavior and tasted better in my opinion.

After a while, my grandfather said that we were going to call it a day, and we packed up and headed from home. When we arrived at the house, we took everything out of the car and went to the back porch to clean the fish. I sat and watched as my grandfather cleaned the fish and prepared them for cooking. He gave them to my grandmother, and we went and sat on the front porch while she fried them. There is a swing on the front porch, and my grandfather and I were swinging when grandmother brought out two plates of fish with sides. The sides were French fries and something else that I do not recall. Most likely it was something that I did not like.

While I sat eating with my grandfather, my grandmother came out to eat with us. I offered to let her sit by my grandfather on the swing, and I stood up and walked over to the steps and sat down. As we all sat there eating, I put some fish in my mouth, chewed it and began to swallow when I felt something in my throat. I lightly cleared my throat, and that is when I felt a sharp pain on one side. A bone stuck in my throat. At first, I did not say anything as I tried to clear it myself. Then my grandmother noticed and asked what was wrong. By that time, I could not talk, so I pointed to my throat. She yelled to my grandfather, and they came running towards me. I remember them trying to get me to drink water and eat some bread, but I couldn't. I was starting to gag now, and I was finding it hard to breathe. One remembrance that stands out during this whole ordeal was the smell of the fish as I choked and struggled to take a breath. I recall that smell to this day, and it is probably the main reason that I do not eat fish. I cannot even stand to smell it cooking. My final recall about the incident was my grandfather bending me over and hitting my back, quite hard. My grandmother told me the remainder of the story.

My grandmother said that after I could not drink nor eat, my grandfather was frantic in his attempt to get the bone to dislodge. I was starting to turn blue as she screamed for somebody, anybody, to stop and help. Then my grandfather picked me up with one hand and with his other hit me as hard as he could in the middle of my back. My grandmother screamed because she thought he had hurt me, the blow sent me across the porch, and I ended up hitting the wall of the house next to the adjacent to the porch. I received a busted lip from hitting the wall, but the bone in my throat came out and fell on the porch. I stopped gagging and started to breathe normally. Then everything calmed down.

I remember looking up at my grandmother over me, and she was asking if I was alright. Outside of having a sore throat, I felt ok. What lingered was the smell of that fish, oh do I hate fish!

How would you catalog this story? As you reflect on it, would you place it in the lucky bracket or does it belong in the blessed? You decide. As for me, it was a blessing, a generational blessing.

Chapter X

An Unknown Illness

I did not feel well at all. I was hot, and my stomach was nauseated. Lying there in bed, I thought about how just a few hours earlier, I had been playing in the backyard. Now I was in bed feeling terrible, hoping that I could go to sleep. Several days would pass after which I found myself waking up, surrounded by strangers wearing white gowns and masks. They had rubber gloves covering their hands and were walking quickly around the room. I could hear my mother's voice. She was speaking with someone, and I overheard a little of their conversation. They were discussing the fact that my fever had remained dangerously high and they had been unsuccessful in getting it to come down. I recall hearing the number 105.

I was staying with my aunts, in Fort Worth, Texas, while my mother was teaching. I have two sisters, but they were staying with my grandparents. I was out in the backyard watering the flowers and shrubs for my aunt. There were plants in beds on three sides of the yard, so it would take a while to water them all. During this time, I would play a game that I called Jet Engine. To play the game, all one needed was some water, a hose, and a nozzle. Turning the water on, I turned the nozzle head to its open position to produce maximum water pressure; pretending that it was a rocket engine, with the water being the exhaust, propelling me forward. I would place my ear close to the nozzle's exit and listen to the noise the water made as it flowed. I would go all over the yard controlling my rocket, with the added benefit of watering the plants.

After a short time, I began to feel ill. I had a slight headache and was nauseated. I decided it was best to take a break and finish watering the plants later in the evening. I turned off the water, wrapped up the hose, and walked up the steps leading to the back porch. My aunt's house had a small back porch where you could stand and oversee the whole backyard. A screen door and a short hallway separated the porch from the kitchen. I opened the screen door, walked through the hall and entered the kitchen. Standing in the kitchen was my aunt, and she asked if I was ok. I replied that I was not feeling so great. She promptly placed her hand on my head and neck to check for the presence of a fever. She said I felt a little warm and suggested I go and lay down for a while. I laid down on the bed, and several minutes later I fell asleep.

My aunts did not usually permit me to sleep in the bed with my clothes on, nor without taking a bath, but on this occasion, they must have relaxed the rules. I was still in the same clothes, in the bed when I awoke the next morning. My aunt came into the room to check on me, and she said that I still had a fever. She left the room and returned a few minutes later and told me that she called my mom and suggested she take me to the doctor.

My mother arrived shortly after and we went to visit our family physician. His office was several miles away, and the movement of the car made my nausea worse. On several occasions, I asked my mom to pull over and stop because I was having trouble keeping things down. We arrived at the doctor's office. The doctor examined me and told my mother that I probably had a viral infection, possibly the flu. He prescribed some antibiotics and sent us home. Several days passed and my fever was still high. It was higher than it was when I initially started taking medicine, so my mother took me back to the doctor.

After reexamination, he informed my mother that they were admitting me to the hospital. The hospital was close, only being several miles from our location. My mother put me in the car and drove there. She checked me in, and I was assigned a room in the children's ward which was occupied by another kid. The nurses came into the room, introduced themselves and provided me with my hospital pajamas that were merely a gown which was closed in the front, but completely open in the back. I did not like that at all, but choices were few. The nurses left the room, so I could change clothes and with my mother's help, I changed and laid down on the bed. The nurses returned and drew some blood for tests, and hooked me up to an IV. My mother took a seat beside my bed, and we waited for the doctor.

After some time, the doctor came in and sat down to talk to us. He explained that he still was thinking I had a viral infection, but they had not been able to determine what kind. He said they had not seen this type of virus before, and that they were concerned that it might be infectious. Therefore, they were transferring me to John Sealy Hospital in Galveston, Texas, where resources were available to analyze unknown infections.

From this point on, I remember very little about the experience. I can recall some events, but many are unclear. The rest of the story I recall from a conversation with my mother.

When we arrived at John Sealy, they assigned me to an isolation room. I was allowed very few visitors, and those who entered the room were required to wear gowns, gloves and face masks. One series of events that I do remember happened the first day. The nurses were coming in and out, filling sample after sample with blood. However, that is about all I remember. I recall very little of the six weeks that I remained there. Yes, I was in the hospital for six weeks, my mom would travel back and forth each day between Galveston and Fort Worth to visit me. My sisters and grandmother came to the hospital to visit, but they would not let my sisters into my room.

The doctors had a difficult time with the diagnosis of my affliction. My fever would go as high as 107 degrees, and everyone was extremely fearful for my life. They had resorted to trying “shots in the dark" treatments, but had prepared her for the possibility that none of the treatments would work. She told me they said, “The next few hours will tell the story.” Mom said she prayed and prayed and asked the lord to save my life. As it turned out, I responded to the last round of treatment and slowly recovered.

When I woke, my mother was sitting beside my bed. She said, “Hi there. How is mommy's little possum tail?” That is what she always called me, her little possum tail :). She asked me how I was feeling? I said better. A few minutes later the doctor came in and informed us that the new treatment appeared to be effective. My mother thanked him as he left the room. She told me that in a few days I might be able to go home. She was right. I left the hospital several days later, and we headed for home.

Chapter X

The Ball

My mother lived in Northern Texas for many years. In her later years, she lived by alone in a two-bed condominium. We used to drive up and visit her often. With each visit, I would always suggest that she needed to come down and stay with at our home. I felt that she getting to a point to where she did not need to be by herself.

The good thing about leaving her by herself was that my sister and her children also lived in the area, so in an emergency I had someone who could get to here in a reasonable time frame.

On one occasion, my wife and I went up to visit her. I had an extra key and garage door opener that I kept so I would not have to wake her up, or have her open the doors.

I opened the garage door and went in the house. The garage connected to the condominium. There was an utility area immediately inside the door connecting the garage where the washer and dryer were kept. There was another door leading from the utility room into the kitchen. Upon entering the kitchen, I noticed a pot that was on the stove located on my left. The fire was burning under the pot, but the pot was empty and just burning. Fortunately, she had been boiling water so there was no grease or other flammable substance in the pot that could have caught on fire.

I went into the my mother's bedroom, said hello, and then asked her what she had been cooking. She said she was boiling some water for eggs, but she had forgotten about the water. I pointed out that this was not the first occasion where I had found the stove on, and that she needed to be more careful. She said that she would.

Part Three

Stories of Protection

In This Chapter

* The Highway
* Swamp Cooler
* Missed Me By That Much
* Attempted Kidnapping
* The Lab
* The Lightning Strike
* Be right back
* Extreme Heat
* Crowded Runway
* Rear Ended
* Chicago Gangs
* Interstate 80
* Slip and Slide

This is the beginning of Chapter Two. Use as many chapters as you need. Delete unused chapters, or copy and paste the last sample chapter as needed to add more chapters to your book.

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Chapter X

The Highway

It was bearing down on me. It was all I could see.  It was white with big blue letters and numbers.  The license plate was zooming in fast and reading the state and the plate number would have been elementary, if I'd had the time. The horn was roaring, like that of a freight train as it approaches a railroad crossing.  The sound of the horn interleaved with  the screams coming from behind me. Humanly screams. I was in a bad place. I could not go back. Trying to reversing direction would have been disastrous, a  more critical mistake than the one I might have already made. There was no other direction to go but forward. Forward as fast as my feet and my new tennis shoes could carry me. However, time was short. It was almost gone. This was not the outcome I had envisioned when I started this experiment. What was I going to do, what could I do?

We  lived in Fort Worth, Texas. My mom, two sisters and me. My sisters were in high-school and I was in elementary school.  My mother was a teacher and during the summer she would take teaching assignments from other schools which frequently carried her to cities outside of the  Ft. Worth/Dallas metroplex. During that time I would usually spend the duration of the assignment with my grandparents.  My grandparents were wonderful people, and they loved me very much and I loved them as well.  They lived in Jacksonville, Texas.  Jacksonville is a small town located in the eastern half of the state, in an area renowned for its deep red-colored soil.  If you have ever been in the East Texas area you are well aware that the soil gets on everything and discolors it as well. It is not the sort of place where you would want to wear light colored attire, and especially some brand new white tennis shoes. I usually spent most of the summer at the community swimming pool or going to movies, and playing and watching baseball. However my most enjoyable form of entertainment was the design and execution of my scientific experiments.  The ideas for my experiments came from school, television programs, and magazines.  I did not have a lot of money to order stuff for my little back-porch laboratory, so my equipment was makeshift , consisting of items I could find around my grandparents home, that which could be borrowed, or whatever I could find outdoors.

My grandparents lived in a white single-story home that was located on the north-west side of the city.  The street where they lived intersected one of the main highways into town.  Highway 175 was a 2-lane highway that entered Jacksonville from the west.  It ran east to west through a short portion of the city where it eventually terminated. It had a single white line that ran down the middle separating the inbound and outbound lanes. The highway was borderless and the sides of the road consisted only of red dirt . At the intersection were two stop signs. One on North side and the other on the South. The highway intersection did not have any type of electronic traffic control. The outbound traffic was normally accelerating when leaving town and the inbound deaccelatering when they reached the intersection. The lack of any traffic control made the intersection extremely dangerous for crossing. The highway was always a major point of emphasis for the adults to us kids. They would warn us about the dangers of walking parallel to or crossing the highway.

One day, my sisters were going to visit some of their friends who lived on the other side of the highway. As they were heading out of the house, I decided that I would tag along and off we went.  We successfully navigated the crossing and preceded to their friends house. We visited for what seemed like hours!  I was getting increasingly bored. What made it worse is that they would discuss the same topic over and over again. Geez! Tagging along was definitely a mistake.  If I could remember all that they were talking about I would share my boredom with you, but I have a better idea to pass the time… Looks like the perfect point in the story for a Lab Flashback!

My sisters were finally preparing to leave, and I was very relieved.  We said our goodbyes, which took another 10-15 minutes.  We headed towards the highway.  There were several automobiles on the highway that were approaching our location from both directions.  The inbound cars were too close, so we waited until they moved passed us.  We stood together on the dirt shoulder watching the outbound traffic approach.  There was only one vehicle and it appeared to still be far away and that is when it hit me. This was the perfect opportunity to try out my new Converse tennis shoes. Another laboratory  opportunity has presented itself! My tennis shoes were so supposed to make you light on your feet … make you jump higher and run faster.  I was timing my sprint, so I waited until it was closer to take off across the highway.  As it approached, I said in my mind "ready, set, GO!"  So I broke out across the highway. Speed against speed. My shoes had me moving quickly and I thought to myself that they really worked!

I was about halfway across the inbound lane, when I noticed something that did not seem right. The car was a lot closer to me than I had anticipated.  It was a lot faster than my tennis shoes. It could really catch up to quickly when you're crossing a highway.  Several things still stick out in mind about that day. My sister's screams, the car horn sounding like a freight train, that license plate. I can remember that license plate staring me in the face.  It looked like it was grinning, but that had to be my imagination, right? To be honest with you, I do not think that driver even tried to slowed down. There was no screeching sounds of the brakes being applied, or the squeal of tires being turned in a direction other than the one intended. Just the horn blasting.  There is a saying that your life flashes in front of you in potentially deadly situation.  Well that did not happen in my case. I guess because I was so focused on those darn license plates.

Then something very strange happened, and to this very day, I cannot tell you what it was. How I made it across the road and avoided that automobile hitting me still makes me wonder.  I could read those license plates because they were directly to the side of me. I just knew I was going to get hit  when all of a sudden I was pass the car and out of harms way.  I am not sure what is was, but I could feel the acceleration. I literally fell down and rolled head-over-heels, several times as a result of that phenomena.  The last two things I remembered was the swish of the car going by me and the sound of horn fading as the car sped on down the highway. The horn fading like that of a freight train as it passes the crossing and heads on down the track .

I cannot remember anything about what happened afterwards.  Nothing after the sound of that horn fading into the distance. I do know that I got into a lot of trouble for that particular experiment.  I cannot remember what the exact punishment was, but I am sure I did not enjoy it.  It was one of the strangest experiences I have ever had. My grandmother would always talk about being prayed-up and generational blessings. I guess I was the recipient of one that day.

So that is the story of  the Frankston highway. It is time for you to make your decision and vote on whether this story describes a lucky happenstance, or does it tell more … another blessing me and my family.

Chapter X

The Swamp Cooler

T I  felt it almost immediately … the electrical sensation caused by those charged up electrons. They had been set free, and their laughter made a faint buzzing sound as they raced through the tip of my fingers, on their journey all the way to my foot. They had established a consistent flow and they were not going to let me shut it off any time soon! It all started when I placed my fingers on the surface of the unit. As my extremities began to get numb and tremble, I began to get worried. My experiment was not going at all the way I had planned. I realized I was in trouble and no matter how hard I tried, they were not going to release me, not today.

It was one of those typical hot and humid east Texas summers. It was a day that produced the kind of humidity that would cling to you like Reynolds Wrap and once outside, render that fresh shower to just a distant  memory.  School was out and I was spending my vacation with my grandparents. I loved spending time with them and this year was no exception.  They lived in Jacksonville which is a small east Texas town , with a population of about 10,000. It is located about 115 miles from Dallas.

At that time, my grandparent's home did not have the any air conditioning. We would keep cool during the day by using several oscillating fans that circulated the fresh air from the shaded open windows.  We would also leave the windows open at night to allow the cooling breezes to flow all through the house and cool it down. With the assistance of the fans, the house cooled down remarkably well. We would even leave the front and back doors open with only a locked screen standing between us and the outside world.  In those days home intrusions were a rare occurrence, so leaving the windows open was considered a standard practice. ;;

I had spent many  a summer in Jacksonville, but this year my summer would turn out to be quite different than the previous ones.  First, to my surprise, we no longer had to depend on the oscillating fans … my grandparents had purchased two swamp coolers and had them installed. The swamp coolers greatly increased the cooling efficiency in the house during the night and the day. A swamp cooler, or evaporative cooler,  is a device that cools the air through the evaporation of water. Its operation is similar to the chill you feel when you step out of a hot shower and into an air-conditioned room, or the shivers you get when you step up out of a swimming pool on a hot summer's day.  When the coolers were installed, one was mounted in the dining room window and the remaining cooler was placed in window in the living room.

The swamp coolers looked like huge boxes with rounded edges. The units were  a tan-gray color with three  exterior sides containing a series of vents. The fourth side  faced the house and contained the air duct assembly which was mounted in the window.   Each unit was held in place by  a mounting apparatus that fixed the flow head into the window enclosure and a set of chains that were bracketed to the exterior of the house and the top rear corners of each unit.   The cooler would operate by circulating water  through the straw pads while the fan would draw the outside air through the straw where it would be cooled. The coolers worked very well and were a huge improvement compared to told oscillating fans and the open windows.  I loved to lay in front of those coolers at night and go to sleep. I spent many a day sitting in front of those coolers imagining all sorts of adventures. I would place one of those toy wind fans in front of the air vent and watch it spend. I would imagine that the fan was turbofan of a jet engine generating tremendous amounts of thrust. I would also place sheets of paper in the air flow and watch the paper move up and down and take on random shapes as I tilted the leading edge of the sheet up and down.

I must have conducted hundreds of experiments during my childhood. I had an insatiable appetite for understanding the unknown and I would dream of all sorts of things. The experiments would sometimes get me into trouble, but that was ok, that was the price of discovery!   Speaking of dreaming,  I used to dream of being the first person on Mars. In fact,  I actually wrote a school essay paper about venturing to Mars for my school science project. In the paper, I stated that the reason I chose Mars instead of the moon was because, by the time I was old enough to be an astronaut, we would have already been there. Little did I know that the paper would be used later as an artifact in the selection process for the United States Air Force academy. However, that is another story for another day.

I enjoyed reading and creating my own experiments to test my childhood theories. Uh oh! Lab Flashback Alert!

One of those theories centered around the concept of propulsion.  Of course at that time I could not have realized that later on in life I would be doing just that , working rocket systems and experimenting in propulsion science.

I loved rockets and marveled at their ability to lift-off and fly into space. I  tried to make all sorts of propellant systems. I would use black cat firecrackers, grounded-up match heads, and gasoline to power my homemade rockets. Yes, I said gasoline! No one knew about that, I think. One of my less dangerous propulsion ideas was to use compressed air.  My projectile was a pencil.  It had a sharp head, a cylindrical body and  lightweight… just perfect.  All I needed was a way to compress the air. That's when I had a brilliant idea! Why not use a paper bag! It could be blown up with air,  and the air would be under pressure. All I had to do was pop it!   So I went into the kitchen, found a paper bag and headed off to my lab to perform my experiment.

The lab was an area I had set aside on the back porch.  The back porch was about 12 feet in length and was surrounded on two sides by screens and a screen door.  The floor was made of red wood and there were two entry doors. I placed the pencil in the bag and started blowing up the bag. I blew as much air into it as I could and tied it off with a rubber band. My system was now charged and ready to go. All that was needed was a way to pop the bag. I decided that I would just burst it went my hands. So I tossed the bag in the air, and like splatting a mosquito, I smashed the bag between both hands. Aaargh! … something had gone terribly wrong! The bag did not pop as expected. In fact, all  I heard was the noise of air escaping out of the bag.  In addition to losing my air supply, my projectile did not fly.  How could it? The tip of the pencil was embedded in the palm of my left hand. For a while,  I stood there astonished until the pain returned me to my senses.  Man did that hurt. The pencil was stuck right in the middle of my hand, you know, the sensitive part. I pulled the pencil out of my hand, wrapped it with tissue and went looking for my grandmother.  She looked at my hand, then shook her head and preceded to clean up the wound.  She did not say much. A short time later, I heard her on the phone talking to my mom.

Ok … back to the swamp cooler.  I was sitting in the kitchen having lunch. Sitting and marveling at how cool the house was because of those coolers.  Then Bingo! Lab Moment alert! Another investigation opportunity had presented itself!  I quickly decided to go outside and try to figure out how those coolers worked. I knew there was the fan that blew the air. I also knew that we had to occasionally pour water into the cooler as the water would eventually evaporate over time. The air was also cooler at night than during the day. Why was all of this so? So I eagerly ventured outside. I  outside to the coolers. I started  examining the cooler by trying to see first through the vents and then the straw pads.  I could see drops of water trickling down the straw and the padding was wet too the touch.  You could place your fingers near the vents and you could feel the hot air outside air flowing into the unit. The unit had a steady vibration and made that white noise sound that fans tend to make.

I needed to get inside. That was the only way that I was going to be able see what was really going on. I thought about taking off one of the side panels since they were not connected with screws, but simply fitted into some slots.  However, that idea quickly faded. My grandfather had mentioned to never remove the panels while the unit was running. And yes, I listened! As I was looking around the sides of the unit,  something caught my eye. There was a puddle of water beneath the cooler that should not have been there. Apparently there was some kind of leak and the water was dripping out. It was dripping from the bottom pan, but I could not see where the leak originated. To get a better view, I bent down and glanced at the underside of the cooler.  I could now see from where the water was leaking. There was a drain plug located under the cooler for cleaning the reservoir, and it had developed a leak. I thought that the plug might be loose, so I grabbed it the see if I could tighten it by hand. It was on there pretty tight and I could get it to budge. Also, the plug was very slippery from the water and the slime that had accumulated on it

I decided that I should  go tell my grandfather about the leak, so I drew my hand back from the plug and started to stand up. As I stood, I placed my right hand on the cooler to help support myself and BOOM! That was when I felt something jolt my hand and started racing down the right side of my body. It felt like my whole right side was vibrating. The feeling started with the fingers of my right hand, through my hand, down my side, down my right leg, and reached all the way down to my foot. At first, I thought the feeling was pretty cool, I really did, but that feeling only lasted for a very short while.  It was cool until my arm and leg started to tremble and shake. I tried to remove my hand from the cooler, but I could not. The electrical current was strong enough that it locked my hand to the cooler. I remember thinking that this thing had a hold of me and was not letting me go!  My whole right side was starting to develop a numbing sensation and I honestly did not know what I was going to do. I was in a bad place. I did not want to call my grandfather because I was sure to get into trouble for being around the unit. So I figured if I used both hands I could try to pry myself a loose. I was about to use my left hand to try and pull my right hand off when something told me NO!. I remember that after all these years.  I did not hear it out loud with my ears, but I remember hearing it plain and clear in my mind. I decided to take the only route available to me, and called out for my grandparent and they came running outside to the cooler. However, by the time they reached me, I was loose and sitting on the ground. I do not remember how, but during the time I called out and the time my grandparents arrived, somehow I was able to remove my hand from that cooler.  I still occasionally think about that incident, and I still do not remember how I was able to do it.

As you might have guessed, my grandfather was none too happy about me being near that cooler, less lone touching it.  Once he determined that I was ok, he said some choice words for me. However, my grandmother stepped in and proceeded to calm things down.  She always did …  besides, I was her favorite grandson! She looked at me and started shaking her head.  Several minutes later I heard her pick up the phone and started dialing my mom.

In the days that followed, I lost some feeling in my right arm and right leg, but it eventually returned. When my grandfather had the unit checked, the technician said that the ground wire on the cooler had come loose, and that is probably why I received the shock. He told us that we were fortunate that the current traveled a path down the right side of my body.   That was the last time I inspected the cooler by myself or without first turning it off. Going forward, I enlisted the help of my grandfather.  I remember thinking at the time … "Man, I was  lucky to get out of that one!".

Chapter X

Missed Me by That Much

Growing up I was always fascinated with airplanes, missiles and spacecraft. I had the ability to use my imagination to make up almost any scenario that you could imagine to keep myself occupied. Sometimes I would even make up survival situations, place myself in them and then see how it would turn out.

One of the survival games that I used to love was the situation where I pretended I was stranded in a desert, without water or transportation. I had no communication devices, so I was disconnect from communications with the outside world.

To prepare for my survival scenario, I would fill a plastic bottle with water. I would then go out into the back yard right near the edge of the porch and back door of our house. Our back yard was rectangular shaped with a side gate located on the right side of the house. In the back yard were several Formosa and pomegranate trees. The yard was fenced in on all four sides and near the rear fence there was a flower garden area that extended about four feet inwards from the fence into the yard. In this flower garden area was various plants, flowers and a few fruit trees. I believe they were plum trees.

Also in the flower area was an underground greenhouse that had been built by the previous owner of the house. I do not remember us actually using it except for storing tools and broken garden items there. The greenhouse was about six feet deep and about twelve feet wide. It had some steep steps that led down into the bottom. The greenhouse was protected and covered by a fence-like top that was made of mesh wire and wood. There were several wooden beams that ran length and width-wise across the top, each being where the wire mesh was attached.

It made for a great club house and hiding place for when I did not want to be found, or for when my friends and I just wanted some privacy.

This particular day, I was performing my survival scenario. There were certain rules that you had to abide by in the survival scenario. Perhaps the most important was that you could not look up and you had to keep your eyes looking directly down towards the ground. You could not look up or around.

So standing at the back door, I closed my eyes and threw the water bottle up in the air. I then got down on the ground, stomach first, and begin to crawl and try to locate the water. That would be the oasis that would be the life saver for the me, the stranded.

One thing that I forgot to mention is that this was a summer game. It also was most effective when it was very hot. I believe that day was around 95 degrees, but it could have been higher. It did not matter because that is what made the situation fun!

I was crawling around looking for the water when I heard a friend call me from the side of the house. I got up, went around to the side gate and let my friends into the back yard. They asked me what I was doing back there in the heat, and I told them I was about to go a look for some ripe plums or pomegranates. I did not want them to know what I was really doing. They would have thought I was crazy.

They said that was great and wanted to know if they could also gather some fruit. I said yes and we headed out to the flower garden area.

There appeared to be no plums, at least ripe ones, so we stared looking in the pomegranate trees. There were several of them in the back year, but the tree closet to the greenhouse appeared to have the best looking fruit. The fruit from this tree was probably more fresh because the tree and some protection from the sun sue the cover provided by a large tree that was in my neighbors yard. Thus the fruit was out of the extreme heat of the day.

We picked some of the low hanging fruit off the branches that extended into the flower garden. However most of the good fruit was much higher and further back into the shaded area of the tree.

There was one problem. The greenhouse was in the way. The only way to get to the tree was to walk all the way around the block and climb over the back fence onto the tree. I did not want to walk all the way around, so I decided that I would climb on the top of the greenhouse and use the wooden beams to walk over to the tree.

I told my friends to wait there since I figured that the greenhouse cover would not hold all of us. I even thought that it might not hold me as well, but I let that thought quickly pass and I stepped out onto one of the beams that made up the cover. I took a few steps and reached the fruit that was hanging at that location. I picked about two or three of them and the proceeded to step further towards the fruit that was more in the shade.

All of a sudden there was a the sound of wood breaking and I fell down threw through the cover into the greenhouse. I landed flat on my back, and it pretty much knocked the wind out of me. My friends started laughing hysterically, until they realized that I was not laughing back, or moving for that matter.

They bent over and looked into the greenhouse to see if I was alright and if I had broken anything. It did not feel like I had anything broken and I told them I was alright. They came down into the greenhouse to help me up. As they were lifting me up I felt something cold touch me on my right side, just above my belt line. We also heard the sound of something tearing. They looked on the side of me and said “Man, look at that!” What they were seeing was a four inch rusty nail that was sticking straight up and had torn through my shirt, but had missed me. One of them said, “dude you are lucky man, that could have really been a mess”.

He was right. After they helped me up I looked back into the greenhouse where I had fallen. The wire was flat from my weight and the wooden beams were broken and laying on the ground. Also there wer all the collection of items that we had either stored or thrown down into the greenhouse. These items included a shovel, various pieces of wood, stakes, etc. Of course most noticeable was the nail that was sticking straight up from one of the broken beams. Strange enough, in the direct area under where my body fell, there were no nails sticking up. Those nails were either on the reverse side of the wood are remained on the other piece of the beam that broke, but did not fall into the greenhouse.

My friends helped me out, I brushed off and we went out into the front yard to eat the fruit we had gathered. Later that evening, I told my mother about the fall. She was upset , of course, and promptly made the greenhouse off limits. She had it filled up with dirt the very next weekend.

Lucky or blessed ?Chapter X

An Attempted Kidnapping

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Chapter X

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The Lightning Strike

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Chapter X

Be Right Back

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Chapter X

Extreme Heat

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Chapter X

A Crowded Runway

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Chapter X

Rear-Ended

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Part Four

Stories with Tint of Humor

In this Chapter

* Telepathy
* Seeing Eye Pooch
* The Electric Chair
* A Cure For Fire Ants
* Rocket Propellants
* Scream For Ice Cream

This is the beginning of Chapter Three. Use as many chapters as you need. Delete unused chapters, or copy and paste the last sample chapter as needed to add more chapters to your book.

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Chapter X

Telpathy

I was interested in the concept of telepathy.   I would read comic books and scan the advertisements for research ideas.  That is when i came upon a series of advertisements that purported to teach you all about telepathy and to become a bona-fide telepath. How cool was that! After reading several articles, I felt that I had this telepathy thing down pat, so all  I needed was to set up an experiment to prove it.  In all, I conducted two telepathy experiments, one of them involved  yellow jackets.  They are very aggressive and I figured I could utilize my telepathic abilities to calm them down. There was a nest in a tree across the street from my grandparents home. So I headed over to the nest.  Around this same time my grandmother came outside and sat down on the swing on the front porch. She asked me what I was doing and I told her that I was experimenting.

When I reached the nest, I looked up and closed my eyes. I tried to focus only on my tiny subjects and trying to speak to them in my mind.  I concentrated hard with the thought "come here." You know, sort of like Dracula would say it. I would then open my eyes to see if there was any activity.  Nothing. I continued to repeat this scenario over and over again for several minutes.  My grandmother yelled at me to leave those hornets alone. I told her I was just looking at them. She said that they did not like people looking at the nest and I had better stop.

By now I was becoming frustrated so I sent out a loud verbal telepathic comment!  I said you stupid wasps, I am talking to you!!  As I was looking up I could see several yellow jacket coming down towards me and I thought to myself that it was working. I stood there and watch as one of them flew straight for my eye and the next thing I knew...Whack!!  My left eye began to sting, then burn. It was amazing how quickly it became swollen shut.

I proceeded to walk quickly back to the house and ran up the porch steps to where my grandmother was sitting. She looked at my eye and started shaking her head back and forth. She said  "What did you do now ? I told you to leave the jackets alone! Just wait until Elease hears about this one." She proceeded to put some snuff on it. She said it would make it feel better. It did not.

Chapter X

I Scream for Ice Cream

His face began to swell, and his stomach was getting queasy. He had a severe dairy allergy and had just ingested some ice cream a few minutes before. He needed to get to the hospital before it started to affect his breathing. Fortunately for him, he was already there.

I have a friend who is extremely allergic to dairy products. He developed the allergy when he was young. However, the allergic reaction seemed to get worse over the years. He also loves ice cream and has an excessive craving for it despite the allergic condition. He told me that he could still remember the taste of ice cream from his childhood and that one day he was going to have it again.

So, later on, he goes to one of the local hospitals and takes a seat outside. He is trying to decide whether to go through with it or do the more sensible thing which was to forget the idea and head home.

Across the street from the hospital was a local convenience store. Sitting on one of the concrete walls that border the hospital property, my friend stares at the store. He watches the people going in and out while trying to make up his mind about what to do. After several minutes he decides that he is going to do it. He had done this same thing many years before, and everything turned out, as he said, okey-doke. So why should anything be different this time around? It turns out that he had forgotten to mention that doctors had warned him that any further exposure to dairy products could put his body into a state where he might stop breathing.

Ignoring the possible consequences, he walked across the street to the store. He walks in and looks around, still a little unsure of his courage to carry it out. He told me that he walked up and down the isles a few times before he made up his mind. "Time to get this over with!" he said to himself, and he headed over to the refrigeration units. He opened the door and selected an ice cream sandwich. He said that it felt so cold in his hands and he closed his eyes and remembered how the ice cream tasted when was a little boy. He told about the joy and fun he had when his grandmother used to make homemade ice cream.

He turned and headed towards the cashier and purchased the ice cream sandwich. The clerk placed the sandwich in a bag. He grabs the bag, thanks the clerk and heads out the door.

Adjacent to the convenience store was a pay phone. Located outside of every convenience store, they were abundant in those days. My friend used the phone to call his parents. After several rings, his mom answered the phone. He proceeded to tells her that he was across the street from the hospital. She asked why he was at the hospital, was he visiting a friend? He replied no, he wanted to be close to the emergency room. His mother asked him why he needed to be close to an emergency room? Was he feeling ill or had he injured himself? He replied, "No mom, I am fine for now." His mother said, "Why for now, what are you talking about!?" He then decided to tell her what he had been spending all morning building up the nerve to do. He had gone a long time without it. Over the years he had to sit and watch all of his friends enjoy it every day. All he could do was watch as they teased him and exaggerated how good it tasted. He had enough, and he was finally going to do something about it. Today was the day, the time, and the place. He was going to eat his ice cream sandwich assuredly!

Now my friend had carefully planned this out. He knew that if he received treatment within a few minutes, he would be fine. The doctors had always told the family that in the case of an accident, they were to get him to the hospital as soon as possible. So, he knew he had plenty of time since he was already there. He calmly told his mother to meet him at the hospital.

He hung up the phone and headed across the street towards the hospital. For some strange reason, I had the feeling that he had pulled similar stunts before.

He walked around to the east side of the hospital. There was the emergency room entrance. He went inside and sat down in one of the waiting room chairs. He said he was nervous, but proceeded to open the bag and take out the ice cream sandwich. He slowly unwrapped the sandwich, raised it up to his mouth and took a huge bite. It tasted so good. He had waited such a long time to experience that taste again. He took another and before he could take a third, he started to get queasy, and his head was beginning to ache. He decided that was enough and headed over to the reception nurse. He told her that he was extremely allergic to dairy products and that he had accidentally eaten some ice cream. He was starting to feel an allergic reaction. The nurse immediately called for help and they took him back to treatment area.

My friend survived the ordeal, but I can tell you that his parents were not too pleased. The doctors were not too thrilled either when they discovered that he had eaten the ice cream on purpose. I also believe his parents had some trouble with the ER insurance payments since he purposefully caused the situation. I do not think that he ever pulled a stunt like that again.

This story is one of the most interesting from a humor perspective. As you reflect on it, would you consider my friend to be lucky, blessed, or just plain crazy? I know he was crazy. A what-if for this story is that the medicine could have easily been ineffective.

Part Five

Some of Our Friends

Part five contains the following stories:

* A Few Weeks to Live
* At Gun Point
* I’ll Be Home for Christmas

The section contains stories of some our close friends. They were happy to share their experiences and contribute to this book. Like all my personal stories, these stories are true. Furthermore, I was there to witness several of them and be involved in the aftermath of others.

If you have some stories that you would like to share with other, contact me via email at luckyorblessed@att.net.

Chapter X

A Few Weeks to Live

This story centers on one of my wife’s best friends.

**Chapter X**

**At Gun Point**

The following story describes an event that just recently happened to the daughter of a close friend of mine. This story should remind us of just how fragile life can be, and encourage us to appreciate every second we spend with loved ones. We never know ….

It was early morning and the sun was yet to make its appearance above the eastern horizon. I had just removed my children from their car seats. Carrying one child in my arms and clutching the other’s hand in mine, I stood up and headed for my apartment. They appeared out of nowhere. Guns drawn and demanding the keys to my car ...

I have two children, a 3-year old daughter and a son aged less than a year, and we had recently moved into our own apartment. We had been living with my mother for several months. Although we had our own place, I was not in a financial position to purchase a vehicle. Therefore, I would sometimes borrow my mother’s car to run errands.

The day before, I had arranged to use the car to take my little boy to the doctor. My mom starts her day early so that morning I needed to get up and take her to work

My mother arrived at my apartment at 4:30 AM and we put the kids into the backseat of the car. We buckled the kids and ourselves and proceeded towards her job which was located downtown. It was a quiet ride with the quiet being interlaced with the gospel music playing on the radio. Both babies were fast asleep. We arrived at my mom’s job around 5:15 AM, she got out, and I slid over into the driver’s seat. “Be careful in my car!” she said. “I will!” I replied. “Call me and let me know how the appointment goes”, she said. “Okay!” I replied, and I drove off and headed for home.

It was around 5:30 AM, when I arrived at my apartment. All the parking spaces in front of my apartment were taken, so I decided to park near the perimeter fence of the complex, which is reserved for visitor parking. There was a wrecker truck parked next to the fence, and I decided to park next to it.

 After parking, I got out of the car, opened the back door and took my daughter out of the car. With her in hand, I walked around to the other side of the car to get my son. I grabbed the diaper bag, removed my son from his car seat and closed the door.

As I stood up and prepared to lock the car two guys appeared out of the dark and approached us. While holding my son in my arms and my daughter clutching my hand, they pointed their guns at me told me give them the keys to the car. “I don’t want to shoot you in front of your kids!” one of them yelled. Hearing those words further terrified me and I gave him the keys. I immediately grabbed the children, and ran for my apartment. I had a progressed through several levels of emotions ranging from horrified to anger.

Even though I was nervous and scared I was able to take a mental picture of the assailants. One of them was about 5’9 with very thin build. I would guess that he was between 16 and 20 years of age. The other one wore a black hoodie pulled down over his face. Although I could not see his face, he too was of slim build. This information would prove useful when recalling the incident to the police.

After getting into my apartment and locking the door, I called my mom. Mother’s are always the first one called, even before calling the police. My mom answered her cell. I was crying, the children were crying, and I struggled to get the words to come out of my mouth as I told her what had just happen. I was so excited that she could not understand me and tried to get me to calm down. She told me to relax, take a deep breath, and tell her what happened. I took a deep breath. “Two guys pulled a gun on me and took the car” I belted out. “Where are kids?” She said. “I got them”, I replied. “Are you okay?”, she asked. “Yes!” I replied. “Did you call the police?” she asked. “No!” I said. “Hang up and call the police”, she replied, in a very calm voice. “When you finish speaking with them call me back!” she added. I said “Okay!” and hung up the phone, to call the police.

Later that day, the police reported that they had recovered the car. The thieves had apparently slammed into several parked cars, and abandoned the vehicle. My mother went over to assess the damage.

It does not take a rocket scientist, hey … that’s me …, to imagine the what -ifs that could result from this story. The ending could have been much, much worse. Instead, it turned out to conclude with one of the best-case scenarios. A friend of mine, who is the mother of the young lady in this story often says “I am thankful for not be giving the what-ifs of life! “.

Chapter X

I’ll Be Home for Christmas

As we passed through the mountains and entered a valley, I watched in horror as the vehicle in front of us swerved back and forth across the lanes of the freeway, while never crossing over the median. It eventually ran over the right shoulder and went out into the snow. I blew my horn repeatedly, hoping to get the driver's attention, but the vehicle continued making its pathway through the snow. Something was wrong.

We had moved to Ogden, Utah earlier that year and we were entering the holiday season. This Christmas was to be our first away from California. However, everyone in the family was homesick and wanted to go back to Sacramento for the holidays. Only one of our kids was attending school at that time, and she was going to be on Christmas recess. Since I had several weeks of vacation remaining, I agreed to take the trip back home.

One of my friends at work was from California as well, and he was also considering going home for Christmas. He was married, and they had one child, a small boy. I believe the boy was a few months away from his first birthday and the grandmother had never seen the baby. It had been several years since they were in California, so he saw this as a perfect opportunity to return home to visit his mom. She lived in Oakland. After some discussion, we decided to head back to California together for Christmas.

We arose early that morning, packed up our respective families and set out for California. To get there from Ogden, you must travel southwest across Utah and through Nevada before reaching the California state line. There are numerous mountain ranges in Nevada, and the route is very scenic. Once you get to Reno, only several hundred miles remain before you enter Northern California.

We had been traveling several hours when we reached the Nevada border. Accompanying the mountain ranges are areas adjacent to the shoulder with steep drop-offs measuring several hundred feet. We had already passed several of these along the way. Directly in front of us, the highway curved to the left, and I watched as my friend's car went around the bend. We approached the curve, and as we rounded it, I looked down the highway but could not locate their car. The road ahead of us was empty of vehicles as far as the eye could see. I immediately started looking through my rearview mirror to see if there was a possibility that they might have pulled off to the side of the road and we had unknowingly bypassed them. Unfortunately, I did not see their car behind us either. I turned back and looked ahead again, glanced to the right of the road, and there they were. I had missed the car previously because it was white and almost impossible to see against the snow. They were no longer on the freeway but were traveling on a snowy embankment adjacent to the road. I glanced down at the speedometer, and we were going 65 mph! When considering freeway driving, that speed is standard, but in the snow, it is dangerous.

I frantically tried to get his attention by blowing my horn and flashing my headlights on and off. Since this was a time before the invention of cell phones, so there was no way to contact him. I sped up to get closer while watching as their car swerved up onto the road and back down into the snow. As the vehicle went further out into the snow, there was an additional danger of hitting one of the iron fences that bordered the fields next to the highway.

Continuing across the stretch of land, I glanced ahead and saw that we were approaching another bend in the highway where the valley ended, and mountains extended directly onto my friend car's path. As I closed in on their car, I continued to blow my horn and flash my lights. I was beside them at this point. I had to carefully monitor the road ahead for oncoming traffic while simultaneously watching their car which could swerve back up onto the highway at any moment and hit us. As we traveled alongside them, my wife rolled down the window and started screaming in their direction.

I was extremely nervous as we were fast approaching those mountains. I needed my friend to wake up immediately. My wife continued screaming and I blowing my horn until we saw his head move, and he looked up. A few seconds elapsed, and the car went into a spin. Making several revolutions, it came to rest next to a fence.

I turned my attention back to the highway, and traffic was approaching in the opposite lane. Therefore, we continued down the road until the path was clear to turn around and head back to their car. We reached the site and drove up behind them. By this time my friend had gotten out of the car, and he was leaning against the driver side door. His wife and kids remained in the car. We jumped out of the car and ran towards him yelling, "Are you guys alright?!" He waved his hand indicating that they were fine. When I reached the car, I asked him what happened? He said that he fell asleep, and I told him that was the understatement of the year. To illustrate my point, I turned him around and pointed him in the direction that we had just come. As we looked down the side of the highway, you could see tire tracks in the snow. They were visible as far as the eye could see. We were amazed that he was able to drive such a long distance, without there being an accident, while asleep. I would venture to guess we had covered more than a quarter mile since I noticed the first signs of erratic driving. His wife and baby had exited the car at this point, and I suggested that she drive so he could rest. She agreed and took over the driving duties. We all climbed back into our respective vehicles, got back on the highway, and headed towards home.

As you reflect on this story, consider the what-ifs. For me, several come to mind: The friend's car could have hit one of the trees that bordered the fence line; it could have swerved across the road into oncoming traffic or perhaps even worse, this valley could have contained one of the drop-offs mentioned earlier.

Part Six

Mystical Stories

Part Six contains the following stories:

Airplanes

The Mockingbirds

The Dark Hole in the Road

This chapter contains stories that really do not fall into our This is the beginning of Chapter Five. Use as many chapters as you need. Delete unused chapters, or copy and paste the last sample chapter as needed to add more chapters to your book.

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Chapter X

Airplanes

[Currently in Grammerly]

Chapter X

The Mockingbirds

The Mockingbirds is another story that I have placed into the mystical category. It is a beautiful story about a marvelous set of events that my whole family was able to experience. I would like to summarize that experience and share it with you.

The sequence of events started one hot summer day in June. It was Saturday, and I was preparing to do my weekly share of yard work. One of the tasks I do before mowing the lawn is to walk the perimeter looking for any debris like pine cones and branches, anything that would be an obstruction to mowing. As I was walking around in the backyard, I came across a baby mockingbird that had fallen out of a nest. The nestling was hopping around in the corner of the fence. Its parents were flying all around, occasionally diving down near my position, and making a lot of noise. We had several cats in the neighborhood at the time, so I knew that the little bird had a zero chance of survival if left on the ground.

I looked around to see if I could find the nest that the bird might have come. Our back fence runs adjacent to a row of small trees and bushes that are in my neighbor’s backyard. I figured that was the most likely area where the nest would be. I did not find the nest, but that was where I decided to place the bird.

I knew that I could not touch the bird with my hands, so I took the chance of going back into the garage to get a pair of gloves. While I was in the garage, my granddaughter came out, wanting to help me in the yard. She always wanted to help, and it was a great joy having her with me. I told her about the little bird, and she accompanied me into the backyard.

As we approached the area where I had last seen the bird, I could see that it was no longer there. The parents were still flying around and making noise, so I knew it was somewhere close. Looking around, we found the bird on one the bottom cross boards of the fence. It was sitting there out in the open, but at least it was off the ground. I carefully picked it up and placed it in a small box. I had brought a step ladder with me, so I unfolded it and set it next to the fence. I climbed to the top with the box in my hand. Once I reached the last step, I reached in gently removed the little bird. I then placed the bird in the bushes where the foliage was densest. The parents continued to fly around and squawk. I stepped down off the ladder, folded it back up, and headed back to the garage. My granddaughter and I then proceeded to cut the lawn.

A couple of weeks had passed since we have found the little bird. My granddaughter and I were in the back in the yard cutting the grass. As we were mowing the lawn, I noticed a mockingbird sitting on the fence. I looked around, and I saw several more birds sitting on top of the other fences. My granddaughter said, “Look dad!” and pointed towards the birds. I replied, “Yes I see them honey” and we continued cutting the grass.

At this point, you might be asking “What is the big deal?” The big deal was that the birds did not fly away when we came close to them with the lawnmower. They did move of course, but only several feet before repositioning themselves on the fence. For several more weeks, the birds perched on the fence. We eventually reached the point where I would whistle at them and on occasion, they would chirp back. My granddaughter would say “Good morning Mr. bird!”. She had started calling them “Our Mockingbird friends!”.

Shortly afterward, the birds started flying down onto the ground and looking for food. They would wait until we cut the grass in an area of the yard and then they would fly down and start eating. The cool thing about this was that they would remain on the ground, even when we passed by with the lawnmower. They were about two mower widths away from us. You would have thought our presence and the noise from the lawnmower would have made them fly off. But they didn't.

As time went on, I would go out into the backyard just to look around, and they would fly out and sit on top of the fence, or fly down and sit on the ground. We never were able to touch them, but they would come close enough that you knew this was a unique and unusual relationship. It was so unique that I share the experience with my family and friends. My wife would look out the window of our bedroom and smile when she saw the birds come down and join us. My daughter’s finance was also amazed when he saw them. I remember him saying, “Dad that is fantastic, I cannot believe they trust you guys that much!”.

All of this went on for close to seven years. My granddaughter had grown up by now and was not helping me cut the grass any longer. The first time I mowed the yard that year, I went out into the back and looked around, but could not find any mockingbirds. I whistled and searched around the entire yard, hoping that one would land on the fence once more. But nothing happened. I must admit that this was a very lonely and sad moment for me. The birds and my granddaughter were gone. They were no longer a part of our little backyard wonderland. I was all by myself. But the memories, all the memories, would remain forever

Chapter X

The Dark Hole in the Road

He was speeding down the road. It was late at night and he was on his way home. There was a full moon that night, so his surroundings were visible in the moonlight. As he rounded a bend in the road, he saw someone standing in the middle of the road. At first, he thought he was imagining things, but as he got closer he realized that someone was there. He was too close for braking, so he quickly laid the bike down. The bike slid by the figure in the road barely missing them. He was furious and as he got back up on his feet, he angrily ran in the direction of the figure. Strangely, they were still standing in the middle of the road. As he got closer, he realized that he knew her. What was she doing way out here?!

I recently into a friend of mine that I had not seen for a long time. He now lives in New York City. He had been married but was since divorced. He did not explain what had happened between them, and I did not venture to ask. His appearance had changed, as we all do as we get older, but there something was not quite right. I asked him how he was getting along, and he replied that he was feeling much better. I said, "Better, relative to what?" He told me that he had been diagnosed with cancer several years ago, but that it was currently in remission. However, he was still taking some experimental treatments which weighed heavily on his body.

We spoke for a while and I asked him what happened and if he found the cancer through self-inspection or was it discovered during a physical examination. He said that he had found the cancer himself, but it was not through any self-examination. I was curious since something had led him to get checked out in the first place. The check-up gave the doctors the opportunity to find the tumor early enough to effect treatment.

The story that he told me was amazing. Amazing enough for me to include in this book. After my experiences with those airplane dreams, I more empathetic to such things. I am sure many of you will relate to this story as well. Perhaps a similar event has happened to someone in your family, to some you know, or maybe even to you.

As you may have concluded, my friend loves motorcycles. Riding them is one of his favorite things to do. He said that he likes the openness that comes with riding them, and he loves to be in the open air. He often would hop on his motorcycle and take trips up and down the state or around the country.

He said that one night he had a dream. He dreamt that is was late evening and he was riding his motorcycle out in the country. It was a one of those nights where the full moon illuminated the country side, so you see much further than normal. He was riding along and had just rounded a curve in the road. The curvature was enough to where you could not see around the bend in the road. As he rounded the bend, he saw a figure standing in the road.

The figure was waving their hands back and forth and yelling for him to stop. Stop they said. Look out for the hole! He was going too fast and was too close to hit the brakes and stop, so he placed the bike into a slide and skid around the figure and came to stop on the side of the road. His leg was badly scarred and burnt from being caught under the motorcycle and the hot exhaust pipes.

He rolled over, and looked up towards the road to where the figure had been. They were still there. He said the he got to his feet and headed towards the figure. As he grew nearer he could see that the figure was that of a person. It was an elderly female and she stood perfectly still. Despite all that had just happened, she had not moved one inch. He told me he screamed at her asking her what the hell she thought she was doing, standing in the middle of the road, and right at the end of a curve in the road. She was lucky that he was able to see her and dump his bike.

At that moment, he realized that the figure was his grandmother! His grandmother had been standing in the middle of the road. How did she get way out here and why was she in the road? He said “Grandma, what in the world are you doing?” She replied, "Look over there baby”, and she pointed to a huge hole in the road. She said you were about to run right into that hole. I came here to warn you, and she was gone. That was the end of the dream.

He told me that he woke up the next morning remembering the dream. He explained how he thought about that dream for several days. Trying to figure out what it meant. His grandmother had passed several years before so he considered that it really had meaning. She had warned him about something. A warning about what? He said that he really did not know why, but the warning encouraged him to go to the doctor and get some tests performed. Even though he felt fine, he decided it was probably best to go. That is how they found the cancer. They found it early enough that they were able to treat it.

That was over 15 years ago. Sadly, today the cancer has come back. The experimental drugs he is taking are affecting his appearance, but they seem to be having a positive effect. The doctors do not know how long they will remain effective, so he is unsure he and when I will see him again. No matter what, he was given at least an additional 15 years to be with and enjoy his family.

So what do you think about this story?

Part Six

Reflections

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Appendix A

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